Winter 2011

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Autochthony, Citizenship, and Exclusion - Paradoxes in the Politics of Belonging in Africa and Europe

PETER GESCHIERE*

ABSTRACT

Our world seems to be globalizing, yet in practice, it is marked more than ever by what Tania Murray Li calls "a conjuncture of belonging." The notion of autochthony plays a special role in this obsession with belonging as some sort of primordial claim: How can one belong more than if one is born from the soil itself? Since the 1990s, the notion has played a key role in politics in several parts of Africa. Yet, its spread has now become truly global. Comparisons with other parts of the world show that this notion retains its apparently "natural" self-evidence and, hence, its mobilizing force, in very different contexts. This article focuses on the notion of autochthony and its ambiguous implications for citizenship and exclusion. The classical example of Athens from the fifth

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century BC is of particular interest since it was the very cradle of autochthony thinking, yet it also highlights autochthony's inherent ambiguities that haunt the world today.

One of the paradoxes of our time is the upsurge of strong preoccupations with belonging in a world that pretends to be globalizing. Notions of autochthony (literally meaning "born from the soil") cropping up in highly different parts of the globe play a particular role in this respect, as some sort of primordial form of belonging with equally radical forms of exclusion as its reverse. The emotional charge these notions recently acquired in different parts of the African continent, including the Ivory Coast, Cameroon, and the Congo, to mention the most obvious examples, will be well known. Yet, the impact of autochthony and the concomitant obsession with belonging as some sort of flipside of the processes of globalization reach much farther than the African continent. My interest in this theme was triggered by the surprising realization that during the 1990s, similar discourses on belonging suddenly invaded everyday politics with highly charged slogans in regions as different as West Africa and Europe.[1] The surprise was all the greater because during this time, the core term "autochthon," with which I had become familiar in Ivorian and Cameroonian politics, had suddenly become a heavily emotional term in Dutch and Flemish discussions on how to deal with immigrants. How could the same language acquire such great mobilizing appeal in completely different settings, and why did this happen at roughly the same moment in time? For Southeast Asia, Tania Murray Li speaks of "a deep conjuncture of belonging."[2] It is quite clear that especially over the last two decades this conjuncture is assuming proportions that are truly global. People may think our world is globalizing, but an increasing obsession with localist forms of belonging seems to be the flipside of such globalization in many contexts, despite all their differences. Li's term "conjuncture" is so well chosen since it brings out that in various regions highly different trends, which seem to be unrelated, converge into this global obsession with belonging. Therefore, it is even more important to define the contexts in which autochthony, as some sort of primordial form of belonging, emerges with such force.

In the context of this article, it is important to highlight the vastly different implications of autochthony as a basic form of belonging for

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1. This article is drawn from content in the Introduction and Chapters 4 and 5 of my book, PETER GESCHIERE, THE PERILS OF BELONGING: AUTOCHTHONY, CITIZENSHIP, AND EXCLUSION IN AFRICA AND EUROPE (2009).

2. Tania Murray Li, *Ethnic Cleansing, Recursive Knowledge, and the Dilemmas of Sedentarism*, 173 INT'L SOC. SCI. J. 361 (2002).

citizenship. Depending on the context, autochthony can become a dangerous rival to national citizenship, drastically undermining earlier ideals of national unity and the equality of all national citizens. On the other hand, it can also be seen as coinciding with national citizenship. In such cases, autochthony slogans demand a purification of citizenship and an exclusion of "strangers." Indeed, whatever the exact pattern in relation to nation and citizenship, autochthony always demands exclusion. Yet, the exact definition of who belongs and who is excluded can change dramatically and abruptly.

Related to this is the curious paradox that emerges in a number of different settings and moments of the notion's long genealogy between the basic security that autochthony discourse seems to promise (how can one belong more than if one is "born from the soil?") and the haunting uncertainties this discourse evokes in everyday practice. Its apparent self-evidence, autochthony as an almost "natural" given, seems to give autochthony discourse great emotional appeal and, therefore, strong mobilizing impact in highly different circumstances. Yet, there is a glaring contrast with its receding quality in practice. The "true" autochthon tends to be constantly redefined at ever-closer range. The search for an impossible purity in a world marked by migration and mixing triggers both constant concerns about one's own autochthony and an equally constant obsession to unmask the traitors residing in one's native land. Recent history is full of lamentable examples of the latter and the terrible violence cleansing these efforts unleash.

To understand why autochthony discourse has led to such tragic events, it is helpful to follow this strange term and its basic paradoxes through different times and places. Indeed, while researching autochthony's history, the complex vicissitudes of the notion in time and space became ever more intriguing to me. As previously stated, I began to work on this notion because I was struck by the coincidence that the same jargon abruptly became so politically charged in such different contexts as Cameroon and the Netherlands; however, studying the notion of autochthony in time and space turned out to be quite an adventurous journey. I had not expected that it would take me to such widely different places and moments.

Both past and present leading thinkers have used autochthony, but they have done so in very different ways. Levi-Strauss gave it a central place in his analysis of the Oedipus myth.[3] Heidegger proposed the term *Bodenständigkeit* as a translation of autochthony and used it to promote a more communitarian form of nationalism for Germany, as a contrast

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3. CLAUDE LÉVI-STRAUSS, STRUCTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY 213-18 (Claire Jacobson & Brooke Grundfest Schoepf trans., 1963).

to the very individualistic Anglo-Saxon and French versions of nationalism.[4] (Unfortunately, but probably not accidentally, Heidegger developed these ideas in the days that he made overtures to the Nazis.[5]) On the contrary, Derrida criticized autochthony as a mark of a too limited (even "phallic") form of democracy, which countries urgently need to surpass for a more universalistic version of democracy.[6] All of these important thinkers drew their inspiration from the same place: classical Athens, the cradle of the very idea of autochthony.

I. CLASSICAL ATHENS: THE FIRST FORTRESS OF AUTOCHTHONY

The idea of autochthonia played a central role in classical Athens. Apparently, the Athenian citizens of fifth century BC, the city's Golden Age and the time of Pericles, Euripides, and Plato, were prone to boast of their "autochthony" as proof that their city was exceptional among all the Greek *poleis*. Since immigrants had founded all other cities, only the Athenians were truly *autochthonoi*, that is, born from the land where they lived.[7] This was also the reason why Athenians would have a special propensity for *demokratia*. The classical texts of Euripides, Plato, and Demosthenes, some of which are discussed in this section, are surprisingly vivid in this respect. To the present-day reader, it might come as a shock to read in the text of these venerated classics the same language of autochthony that is now so brutally propagated by Europe's prophets of the New Right. Indeed, this similarity did not go unnoticed by these prophets, as may be clear from an incident in France.

On May 2, 1990, a Member of Parliament in the French Assemblée Nationale, Marie-France Stirbois, also part of Le Pens Front National, the most right wing party in France, surprised her colleagues by delivering a passionate speech about classical Athens and the way in which Euripides, Plato, and even Socrates defended the case of

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4. *See* CHARLES BAMBACH, HEIDEGGER'S ROOTS: NIETZSCHE, NATIONAL SOCIALISM, AND THE GREEKS 135-37 (2003); JOHANNES FRITSCHE, HISTORICAL DESTINY AND NATIONAL SOCIALISM IN HEIDEGGER'S *BEING AND TIME* 286 n.62 (1999); Rob Garbutt, *White "Autochthony,"* 2 AUSTL. CRITICAL RACE & WHITENESS STUD. J., No. 1, 2006, at 5, 11, http://www.acrawsa.org.au/ejournalFiles/Volume%202,%20Number%201,%202006/RobGarbutt.pdf.

5. *See* FRITSCHE, *supra* note 4, 138-42 & 286 n.62.

6. *See* JACQUES DERRIDA, POLITICS OF FRIENDSHIP 104-06 (George Collins trans., 1997). *See also* MUSTAPHA CHÉRIF, ISLAM AND THE WEST : A CONVERSATION WITH JACQUES DERRIDA 43-45 (Teresa Lavender Fagan trans., 2008).

7. Indeed, the Athenians went even further by declaring their autochthony to be absolutely unique among all the Greeks: their city was the only city where the citizens – at least the "real" ones – were *autochthonoi*; therefore it could justly claim pre-eminence over all the Greeks, and certainly over the Barbarians.

autochthony.[8] Apparently, her colleague deputés were somewhat surprised as, until then, Mme Stirbois' interventions had not portrayed such an in-depth interest in the classics (or any academic subject for that matter). Clearly, another sympathizer of Le Front National, probably a professor at the Sorbonne, had written the speech for her. The incident inspired two leading French classicists, Nicole Loraux (a good friend of Derrida) and Marcel Detienne, to look into the issue of Athenian autochthony.[9] Both authors show, with impressive eloquence, that the Athenian authors should be taken seriously since these classical voices sharply highlighted, maybe inadvertently, the tensions inherent in the autochthony notion.

At first sight, the Athenian claim to autochthony seems to be as natural and as unequivocal as, for instance, the claims of the new President of the Ivory Coast, Laurent Gbagbo, that one needs to distinguish Ivoiriens *de souche* (literally "from the trunk of the tree") from later immigrants (Le Pen uses a similar jargon in France). However, Loraux's and Detienne's visionary analyses show that it may be worthwhile to take a closer look at Athenian language on autochthony. A return to the classical locus of autochthony is rewarding since the tensions and inconsistencies of this apparently unequivocal notion come to the forefront in particularly striking ways. This may be clearer from the following examples that testify to both the vigor and the complexities of autochthony in Athenian thinking.

In Erechtheus, one of Euripides' most popular tragedies,[10] the playwright has Praxithea, King Erechteus' wife, offer her own daughter for sacrifice, in order to save the city:

> I, then, shall give my daughter to be killed. I take many things into account, and first of all, that I could not find any city better than this. To begin with, we are an autochthonous people, not introduced from elsewhere; other communities, founded as it were through board-game moves, are imported, different ones from different places. Now someone who settles in one city from

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8. NICOLE LORAUX, NÉ DE LA TERRE: MYTHE ET POLITIQUE A ATHENES 204 (1996).

9. MARCEL DETIENNE, COMMENT ETRE AUTOCHTONE: DU PUR ATHENIEN AU FRANÇAIS RACINE (2003); *see also* LORAUX, *supra* note 8.

10. EURIPIDES, Erechtheus, *in* 1 THE PLAYS OF EURIPIDES: SELECTED FRAGMENTARY PLAYS 148 (Christopher Collard et al. eds., trans., 1995). Unfortunately, only a few fragments of the text have been conserved.

> another is like a peg ill-fitted in a piece of wood – a
> citizen in name, but not in his actions.[11]

This is heavy language under weighty circumstances. The play's story is that Athens is threatened with destruction by Eumolpus and his Thracians invading Attica. The Delphi oracle has prophesized that King Erechtheus can only save the city by sacrificing one of his own offspring.[12] The king seems to hesitate, but his wife shows him what autochthony means in practice: "This girl, not mine in fact except through birth, I shall give to be sacrificed in defence of our land. If the city is captured, what share in my children have I then? Shall not the whole then be saved, so far as is in my power?"[13]

Euripides' tragedy was based on a myth, placed in a mythical time, but it was clearly topical to Athens' situation in 422 BC when the play was first performed.[14] At that time, the city was at the height of its naval power, but it was already locked in mortal combat with its archrival Sparta.[15] Indeed, there was good reason for celebrating Athenian uniqueness at the time. In other respects, Praxithea's words must have seemed highly to the point for the audience. Her scorn of people "who settle[] in one city from another" being like "a peg ill-fitted in a piece of wood" no doubt had special meaning in fifth century Athens, where the majority of the population were seen as foreign immigrants (metoikoi).[16] Adding to the scorn, quite a few immigrants were wealthier than the true Athenian citizens.

With Plato, Athenian autochthonia seems equally self-evident. Plato describes Socrates, who is instructing young Menexenes on delivering a funeral oration for fallen soldiers (a big occasion in fifth century Athens),[17] as celebrating Athenian uniqueness in no uncertain terms: "the forefathers of these men were not of immigrant stock, nor were these their sons declared by their origin to be strangers in the land sprung from immigrants, but natives sprung from the soil living and

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11. *Id.* at 159.

12. *Id.* at 148-49.

13. *Id.* at 161.

14. *Id.* at 155.

15. *See id.*

16. *Id.* at 159.

17. PLATO, Menexenus, *in* TIMAEUS, CRITIAS, CLEITOPHON, MENEXENUS, EPISTLES 329 (R.G. Bury trans., reprtg. 1966). Socrates pretends in his dialogue that he has been trained in how to deliver an *epitaphios* (funeral oration) by none other than Aspasia, Pericles' famous spouse (or rather, "partner"?). Some emphasize the ironical elements in the Menexenes dialogue. *See* DETIENNE, *supra* note 9, at 21. However, it seems clear that once Socrates'/Plato's exemplary oration gets going, irony gives way to patriotism. *See* PLATO, *supra* at 330.

dwelling in their own true fatherland."[18] As the next step in his didactic model for a funeral speech, Plato, still speaking through Socrates' mouth, makes his famous (or notorious) equation of autochthonia and demokratia:

> For whereas all other States are composed of a heterogeneous collection of all sorts of people, so that their polities also are heterogeneous, tyrannies as well as oligarchies, some of them regarding one another as slaves, others as masters; we and our people, on the contrary, being all born of one mother, claim to be neither the slaves of one another nor the masters; rather does our natural birth-equality drive us to seek lawfully legal equality.[19]

As in Africa (see below), funerals, and more notably funeral orations, were a high point in the expression of Athenian autochthony,[20] and, as will be explained later in this article, today's African funerals exhibit many of the same expressions of autochthony. In general, autochthony in Greece, as elsewhere, was linked to heavy ritual (like the above funeral oration) and symbols that verge on the burlesque.

In another of Euripides' tragedies, Poseidon, furious that the Athenians preferred the goddess Athena to him as the city's protector, punishes Erechtheus for his dearly bought victory over the Thracians.[21] With his terrible trident, Poseidon cuts a deep cleft through the Akropolis (Athens' main mountain) so that Erechtheus disappears in the chasm. Erechtheus remains literally "locked in the earth," an

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18. PLATO, *supra* note 17, at 343.

19. *Id.* at 347.

20. See, for example, LORAUX, *supra* note 9, on Pericles' famous *epitaphios* for the Athenians fallen in the first years of the long war against Sparta, and Demosthenes funeral addresses from a later period (second half of the 4th century), when Athens was threatened by the Macedonians (led by Philippos, father of Alexander). There are striking parallels in very different times and situations. Compare *id.* with the famous dictum of Maurice Barrès, a champion of French nationalism in the 1880's, that the main things needed for creating a *conscience nationale* were "a graveyard and the teaching of history," DETIENNE, *supra* note 9, at 131 (quoting MAURICE BARRÈS, 1 SCÈNES ET DOCTRINES DU NATIONALISME 25 (1925)), and Peter Geschiere, *Funerals and Belonging: Different Patterns in South Cameroon* , 48 AFR. STUD. REV., Sept. 2005, at 45, 47 ("The wild funeral rituals among the Maka . . . strongly emphasized the affinity between local groups and people's place—their belonging—in the network of kinship. It was the negotiation of this kind of belonging that seemed to be at the heart of the proliferation of death rituals and their constant innovation."), and *infra* p. 334-35 (describing how certain funerals turn into emotionally-charged festivals of belonging).

21. *See* EURIPIDES, *supra* note 10, at 149, 171, 173.

appropriate position in view of his emphatic chthonic character, which is invariably repeated whenever he is mentioned.[22] Eventually, Athena, the city's chosen goddess, saves the day. She ordains the consecration of a small temple called the Erechteion, in honor of the "King-Locked-in-the-Earth." The temple is situated on the Akropolis as the focal point for celebrating Athenian autochthony.[23]

Indeed, burlesque as some of the founding myths of this Athenian particularity may seem now, it is clear that, at the time, this heavy symbolism had powerful appeal. In Athens, the reference to the soil in autochthony discourse is affirmed by the rhetoric of funeral orations, and the symbolism of the "King-Locked-in-the-Earth" in particularly graphic ways. This confirms the idea that autochthony is a longstanding trait of Athens. Indeed, this pride in Athens' autochthony as an old tradition was so convincing that it was later accepted by many modern classicists.[24]

Yet, recently, several historians have raised doubts about this shiny image of classical Athenian autochthony—doubts that must have worried contemporaries as well. There is a clear tension with the study of history as it was practiced already at the time. Striking is that two of the most prominent historians of the Athenian era do not make special mention of Athens with respect to autochthony. Herodotus mentioned a wide array of autochthonous groupings, some more autochthonous than others, but he did not mention this trait in relationship to Athens.[25] Thucydides seemed determined to avoid the very word "autochthon," probably because he distrusted its rhetorical use.[26] Instead, he argued that Athens' preeminence was due to its success in attracting immigrants (the metoikoi) from all over Greece.[27] Indeed, the upsurge of autochthony in Athens in the fifth century seems to be intrinsically related to this influx of immigrants, who, especially in the Piraeus harbor area, were rapidly becoming the majority of the population. In sum, Athenian autochthony expressed a determined effort by the city's citizens to exclude newcomers from citizenship.

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22. *See* DETIENNE, *supra* note 9, at 42 (translating a variant of the king's name, Erichthonios, as *le Très-Terrien*).

23. EURIPIDES, *supra* note 10, at 175 & 193 nn.90-91.

24. *See* Vincent J. Rosivach, *Autochthony and the Athenians*, 37 CLASSICAL Q. 294, 294 (1987) ("Athenians of the fifth and fourth centuries claimed with pride that their ancestors had always lived in Attica . . . . Related to this Athenian belief . . . was a second, that, as a people, they were literally 'sprung from the earth'. It is generally assumed that both beliefs developed at a very early date, but this is merely an assumption, and . . . we . . . see evidence suggesting, to the contrary, that both ideas were relatively late developments.").

25. DETIENNE, *supra* note 9, at 49.

26. LORAUX, *supra* note 9, at 94.

27. *Id.* at 95.

Vincent Rosivach, a historian of our times, even shows that the very term "autochthon" must have been of a much later coinage, probably circa the fifth century, when Athens was emerging as the major power among the Greek cities.[28] He proposes to distinguish between an "indigenous" and a "chthonic" use of the term.[29] It is certainly true that Homer presents, for instance, Erechtheus from Attica as a chthonic figure.[30] But in Rosivach's view, this figure is expressed in a different sense, as some sort of primal, serpent-like figure or monster closely tied to the earth.[31] It is only during Athens' upsurge that Erechtheus was linked to the Athenians' search for proving their exceptional indigenity, giving the chthonic component in autochthon a quite different implication.[32] Rosivach's conclusions may be quite hypothetical,[33] but his insistence on the opposite understanding of chtonic origin—it can also imply primitivizing a being or a group as some sort of primal phenomenon—is very relevant in modern day situations. In Africa, as elsewhere, autochthon's double meaning, as both prestigious first-comer and as primitive or pre-human, comes up time and again.

In the same line as Rosivach, Marcel Detienne emphasizes that, in general, Greek claims to autochthony must be somewhat ahistorical since those claims denied per definition the great era of Greek colonization of the seventh and sixth century BC, when new poleis were founded all over the Eastern Mediterranean in an adventurous expansion process.[34] Even Athens was largely a city in formation up to the fifth century.[35] It is indeed striking that the laws on citizenship

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28. *See* Rosivach, *supra* note 24, at 297 ("[S]ince autochthony is not simply a matter of difference but one of superiority, the concept may well have become prominent as late as the 470s and beyond when the Athenians became rivals with the Dorian Spartans.")

29. *See id.* at 294-301.

30. *See id.* at 294-95.

31. *See id.*

32. *See id.* at 294 ("[I]n the course of time . . . the Athenians did come to associate Erechtheus' chthonic origins with their own indigenous origins . . . .").

33. It is indeed clear that the veneration of Erechtheus, the arch-father of Athenian autochthony—the king, mentioned before, who was so graphically locked inside the earth itself by Poseidon's revenge—cannot be that old. Archaeologists maintain now that the Erectheum, his temple where Athenian autochthony was sanctified, was built between 430 and 422 B.C. DETIENNE, *supra* note 9, at 44. That is at the very same time that Euripides wrote his Erechtheus play in which Athena ordered the Athenians to build this temple. EURIPIDES, *supra* note 10, at 193. A similar tension between founding and belonging also haunts Plato's Republic. The founder of his model city—who necessarily must have come from elsewhere to found his "new" city—has to acquire a certain aura of autochthony in order to create a myth of belonging. Plato describes this as "a beautiful lie," that will serve as a basis for the civic instruction of its newly settled citizens. *See* Rosivach, *supra* note 24, at 303. *Cf.* LORAUX, *supra* note 9, at 176.

34. DETIENNE, *supra* note 9, at 52-53.

35. *Id.*

promulgated in 509 BC by Cleisthenes, Athens' great legislator during the city's ascension, were much more inclusive than Pericles' citizenship law from 451 BC, during the city's heyday.[36] Although Pericles' law came only a little over fifty years later, it brought incisive changes, reserving Athenian citizenship only for those who could claim that both parents were Athenian.[37]

Nicole Loraux problematizes Athenian autochthony—and hence autochthony in general—at an even deeper level. For her, the insistence on having remained on the same spot is a basic denial of history, which always implies movement.[38] Athenian autochthony is a kind of negative history, which always needs an "Other"—movement in whatever form— in order to define itself.[39] On a practical level, this implied for Athenians a guilty denial of memories of earlier migrations, especially for the city's aristocratic families who were once proud of their founding histories, often referring to their proclaimed provenance as some sort of mythical charter.[40] Loraux signals that in other classical texts on autochthony, history and movement are a hidden subtext undermining autochthony's rigid memory.[41]

A blatant expression of this can be found in one of Euripides' most famous tragedies, Ion, which is probably his most outspoken celebration of autochthony.[42] For modern readers (and viewers), the force of the play mostly lies in Euripides' beautiful verses, in which he allows the actors to express their rage against the gods and the careless way the gods handle mortals. But another possible reading of the text, one that takes into account Athenians' preoccupation with autochthony, suggests that this latter theme must have been at least as important. Consider Ion's statement when his new "father" (who later turns out not to be his real father) tries to take him to Athens while Ion still believes he himself is a stranger to the city:

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36. *Id.* at 53.

37. *Id.* Again the parallels with present-day struggles are striking. For example, Le Pen's half-hearted attempts to fix the notion of *Français de souche* as reserved to those who have four grand-parents born in France—a proposition he rapidly had to give up since many of his followers would not meet this criterion, or the fierce debates in Ivory Coast, directly related to the contested position of Alassane Ouattara (the leading politician from the North), over "and" versus "or"—that is, whether father *and* mother had to be Ivorian in order to grant Ivorian citizenship to their off-spring; or would father *or* mother suffice for this?

38. *See* LORAUX, *supra* note 9, at 99.

39. *See id.* at 82 ("[T]he discussion of being a native is fragile because by definition [the native] needs others, even if it means being rejected in one's non-belonging.")

40. *Id.* at 84.

41. *Id.*

42. EURIPIDES, *Ion*, *in* EURIPIDES, TROJAN WOMEN; IPHIGENIA AMONG THE TAURIANS; ION 313 (David Kovacs ed., trans.1999).

> They say that the famous Athenians, born from the soil,
> are no immigrant race. I would be suffering from two
> disabilities if I were cast there, both the foreignness of
> my father and my own bastardy. . . . For if a foreigner,
> even though nominally a citizen, comes into that pure-
> bred city, his tongue is enslaved and he has no freedom
> of speech.[43]

This is vintage autochthony thinking. However, as the tragedy unfolds, this theme leads to so many complications that the story can also be read as some sort of carnival of autochthony. Ion must be crowned in the end as Athens' truly autochthonous king, even though he is Apollon's son and adopted by a father who is in fact a stranger (the latter is even led to believe that he is Ion's "real" father).[44] As Detienne puts it so graphically, "nothing is impossible in autochthony."[45]

There is a clear reflection here of the deep unrest in autochthony thinking, which Loraux brings out so well by insisting on the sheer impossibility of excluding history.[46] People are not what they seem to be. If a foreigner, like Ion, can turn out to be an autochthon, the reverse can also be true. Indeed, the obsession with having traitors on the "inside" and the urgent need to unmask them, which is evident from the recent developments in the Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Rwanda, and many other hotspots of autochthony, was very present in classical Athens as well. If someone put an Athenian's citizenship into doubt, the Athenian could summon the slanderer before a city tribunal.[47] However, this implied a huge risk. If the slanderer's accusations were indeed correct, his target would not only lose his citizenship, but also his liberty, as he could be sold as a slave.[48]

The above may indicate why the present-day New Right in Europe is tempted to quote the celebration of autochthony in classical Athens as a precedent to be respected. However, both Loraux and Detienne convincingly show that upon closer reading, these texts highlight the basic impossibilities of autochthony. In ancient Athens, autochthony struggled to come to terms with a history that constantly undermined the apparent self-evidence of chthonic belonging. Even more

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43. *Id.* at 397, 403. Later, this same Ion is to learn that his "real" mother is the sole inheritor of the city's autochthonous royal line—Greek stories seem to love playing havoc with lines of descent!

44. *Id.* at 317-18, 505-15.

45. DETIENNE, *supra* note 9, at 59.

46. LORAUX, *supra* note 9, at 195.

47. *Id.*

48. *Id.*

importantly, the texts create great uncertainty about "authentic" and "fake" autochthony, hence the obsession with purification and the unmasking of traitors-in-our-midst.[49] Such uncertainties make the notion, despite its apparent self-evidence, a fickle basis for the definition of citizenship, and unfortunately this problem is all too relevant for autochthony's present-day trajectories.

II. AUTOCHTHONY NOW: GLOBALIZATION AND THE NEO-LIBERAL TURN

Clearly then, autochthony has had a long history. The discourse of its present-day protagonists is certainly not new; rather, it brings a reshuffling of elements from former days. Beginning in the late 1980s and continuing to the present day, autochthony has experienced a powerful renaissance. Yet, the question remains: Why has autochthony become such a tempting form of discourse in many parts of the globe?

Tania Murray Li's notion of a "conjuncture of belonging" points to various aspects of what has come to be called "globalization" as important factors.[50] One important aspect of globalization is the rapidly increasing mobility of people, on both a national and transnational scale, which produces a wider context for people's preoccupation with belonging.[51] But Li's approach also allows one to outline more specific

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49. Marcel Detienne focuses in his last chapter also on present-day historians and their ongoing contribution to the reproduction of autochthony thinking. DETIENNE, *supra* note 9, at 139. His main example—and indeed a quite shocking one—is Fernand Braudel and one his more recent books. FERNAND BRAUDEL, L'IDENTITE DE FRANCE: ESPACE ET HISTOIRE (1986) [hereinafter BRAUDEL, L'IDENTITE]. Braudel had first made his name with *La Mediterranée*, which showed in a challenging way how to write a history that surpassed the limits of the nation-state and nationalist thinking. FERNAND BRAUDEL, LA MEDITERRANEE ET LE MONDE MEDITERRANEEN A L'EPOQUE DE PHILIPPE II (1949). So it is, indeed, a bit disconcerting that the same Braudel starts this later book by emphasizing that, after all, a historian is really at home with the history of his own country—a familiarity that brings Braudel to project *notre hexagone* (the favourite national metaphor to indicate France and its territory) back into pre-historical times, and to link the paleolithic drawings of Lascaux to French identity. BRAUDEL, L'IDENTITÉ, *supra*, at 10. Detienne cites all this as an illustration of the "extra-ordinary weight of nationalist thinking" that in the end could even constrain the view of an historian with such a broad vision as Braudel. DETIENNE, *supra* note 9, at 142.

50. *See* Li, *supra* note 2.

51. Historians, see, for example, Jan Lucassen & Leo Lucassen, *Migration, Migration History, History: Old Paradigms and New Perspectives*, in MIGRATION, MIGRATION HISTORY, HISTORY: OLD PARADIGMS AND NEW PERSPECTIVES 9, 28-31 (Jan Lucassen & Leo Lucassen eds., 1997), may emphasize that, demographically, migration in many parts of the world was more important in earlier centuries. Yet it is clear that the facilitation of mobility by new technology conjures up a vision of a rapid increase of migration, and it is precisely this vision that plays such a central role in much autochthony discourse. See also ARJUN APPADURAI, MODERNITY AT LARGE: CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF GLOBALIZATION 37

factors that vary from region to region. Li emphasizes global concerns over the loss of biodiversity, "indigenous people," and "disappearing cultures," as crucial factors in this upsurge of concerns over belonging.[52] For Africa, the predominant globalizing factors might be the twin processes of democratization and decentralization, both closely related to the recent emphasis on the need to "bypass" the state in the policies of the global development establishment.

Throughout the continent in the early 1990s, a new wave of democratization seemed initially to signal a promising turn towards political liberalization. Yet, in many countries, it inspired attempts toward closure in order to exclude fellow countrymen from their full rights as national citizens or, at least, to differentiate between citizens who "belong" and others who do not. The Ivory Coast offers particularly tragic examples, as evidenced by the Opération nationale d'identification, which was announced in 2002 with some fanfare by the country's new President Laurent Gbagbo,[53] confirmed champion of autochthony. The idea was that each person had to return to his or her village of origin in order to claim national citizenship.[54] All persons who could not identify a specific village within the country as their place of origin would automatically lose their citizenship.[55]

In eastern Congo, the enigmatic Banyamulenge (opponents call them Banyarwanda, meaning "Rwanda people"), similarly became the object of fierce struggles over belonging and autochthony, fanned by former President Mobutu's machiavellistic manipulations in offering them full citizenship and withdrawing it at will.[56] In Anglophone Africa, belonging also became a crucial issue in the new style of politics. In Zambia, former President Kenneth Kaunda was excluded from the political competition with the simple claim that he "really" descended from strangers. In a completely different context, the new African

(Public Worlds Ser. No. 1, 6th prtg. 2003) for a powerful definition of globalisation as the increased mobility of goods, people, and ideas; for him, ideas are at least as important as the other two in this triplet.

52. See Li, supra note 2, at 164, 170.

53. Richard Banégas, Côte d'Ivoire: les jeunes « se lèvent en hommes » Anticolonialisme et ultranationalisme chez les Jeunes Patriotes d'Abidjan 11-12 (Centre d'Études et de Recherches Internationales, Les Études du CERI Paper No. 137, 2007.

54. Ruth Marshall-Fratani, The War of "Who Is Who": Autochthony, Nationalism, and Citizenship in the Ivorian Crisis, 49 AFR. STUD. REV. 9, 27 (2006).

55. See id. See also Richard Banégas & Ruth Marshall-Fratani, Côte d'Ivoire, un conflit régional?, POLITIQUE AFRICAINE, Mar. 2003, at 5, 6; Banégas, supra note 53, at 32; H.M. Yere, « La Côte d'Ivoire, c'est la Côte d'Ivoire! »: A Reflection on the Idea of the Nation in Côte d'Ivoire (2006) (unpublished manuscript) (on file with author). Until now, this idea has only been applied in mitigated forms but it is still around in government circles.

56. See Stephen Jackson, Sons of Which Soil? The Language and Politics of Autochthony in Eastern D.R. Congo, 49 AFR. STUD. REV. 95, 104-06 (2006).

National Congressional democracy in South Africa became marked by furious popular reactions for excluding all Makwere-kwere—"these" Africans from across the Limpopo.

As important as democratization was, the drastic shift in the policies of global development agencies, like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and other major donors, was equally as important. These policies shifted from an explicitly statist view to an equally blunt distrust of the state.[57] Up to the early 1980s, it seemed self-evident that development had to be realized through the state and that the first priority was strengthening the state and encouraging nation-building by the new state elites. The state was subsequently no longer seen as a pillar, but rather as a major barrier to development in the World Bank's official view.[58] The Bank's 1989 report on Africa, not coincidentally coinciding with the very moment the Cold War was clearly over, made "bypassing the state," strengthening "civil society" and NGOs, and, notably, "decentralization" the buzz words.[59] But just as democratization created an unexpected scope for autochthony movements, the new decentralization policy and the support of NGOs, often quite local in character, similarly turned issues of belonging and exclusion into burning questions. In Cameroon, for instance, a new forest law, heavily supported by the World Bank and World Wildlife Fund, helped to make autochthony—that is, the question as to who could be excluded from the development projects new style by "not really" belonging—a hot item, even in areas that are so thinly populated that there seem to be no demographic pressure on the soil or other resources.

Important in all of this is that such developments cannot be dismissed as merely political games (maneuvers imposed from above by shrewd politicians or well-meaning "developers"). Political manipulations and external interventions by development agencies certainly play a role in all of the examples quoted above, but they can only work because the very idea of local belonging strikes such a deep emotional chord with the population in general. Indeed, the force of the emotions unleashed by a political appeal to autochthony is often so strong that it threatens to sweep the very politicians who launched it right from their feet. This is, for instance, vividly illustrated by the increasing importance throughout the African continent of the funeral

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57. *See, e.g.,* The World Bank, *The World Bank's Changing Discourse on Development, in* READINGS IN MODERNITY IN AFRICA 27 (Peter Geschiere et al. eds., 2008) (containing an overview of speeches by World Bank directors and other representatives from 1972 to 1989 that shows how deep a shift took place in the 1980s).

58. *See id.*

59. *Id.* at 30.

"at home" (that is, in the village of origin). The funeral turns into a true festival of belonging, often to the clear discomfort of urban elites who dread such occasions when the villagers can get even with "their brothers" in the cities. Marked by a proliferation of all sorts of "neo-traditional" rites that often involve great expenditure, these occasions show how deeply this obsession with belonging is rooted in society. It also shows the complex balancing that exists between returning and maintaining the distance required from urban elites.

Indeed, for many regions, there is a direct link between democratization and the increasing exuberance of the funeral "at home," a clear sign of how important local belonging has become. All of this is not in spite of liberalization, but rather because of liberalization. Therefore, a major challenge in studying autochthony and the politics of belonging is identifying the relationship between shrewd political manipulation, on the one hand, and deep emotional involvement, on the other, since the combination of both seems to be at the heart of the conundrum of belonging and exclusion that is becoming so central in our supposedly globalizing world.

One of the interesting aspects of the term autochthony is that it easily bridges the gap between the global South and North.[60] Apparently, its language works as well in Flanders or Holland as it does in Cameroon or the Ivory Coast, but the background here is rather the increasing fear of transnational immigrants—"guest laborers"—who are not planning to go back home again.

In the late 1980s, I became familiar with the Dutch version of the term autochthony, mainly from the Netherlands' southern neighbors in Flanders. But in subsequent years, the term also conquered the Netherlands with surprising speed. In 2002, the shocking murder of Pim Fortuyn, Holland's most successful populist politician made his heritage all the more powerful.[61] Since Fortuyn's meteoric career, Dutch politicians have realized that electoral success depends on taking autochthony seriously. Since the murder, the defense of the "autochthonous cultural heritage"—which for the Dutch, always proud of not being overly nationalistic, proved to be quite hard to define—has become a dominant theme, together with the idea that more pressure is needed to make immigrants "integrate" into this elusive culture.[62]

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60. In this respect, there is again an interesting difference with the related notion of "indigenous." The latter seems to retain its exoticizing tenor (it mostly refers to "others"—i.e. people with a non-Western background). Autochthons are not necessarily the "others." Indeed, the term can be adopted by majority populations also in the West. *See supra* Part I.

61. *See* GESCHIERE, *supra* note 1, at 134-36.

62. *See id.* at 135-37.

The term autochthony is now less current in France and is almost absent in Germany and the United Kingdom, even though similar concerns about belonging are high on the political agenda there as well. However, the term crops up in unexpected places. In Italy, Umberto Bosi has recently adopted it for his Lega Norte; it has also emerged strongly in the Pacific and in Quebec, although in a different sense.

An illustration can show how great the confusion can become when autochthony, with its different meanings, crosses the lines between continents. In 2006, I attended, together with several Africanists, a conference focusing on the theme of autochthony at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris' leading institute for social sciences. The conference was organized in close collaboration by colleagues from Quebec and France. For the Québécois and their French counterparts, the meaning of autochthony was clear. In the 1980s, they had decided that it was the translation of the budding Anglophone notion of "indigenous," clearly because since the colonial period, the more direct French translation indigène had such a pejorative charge that it had to be avoided at all costs.[63] The Quebec version of the term, les autochtones means "indigenous people"—that is, people in a minority position who are threatened in their way of life by dominant groups. In this view, Quebec's Native Americans are the prototype of *peuples autochtones.*

At the conference, however, the Quebec colleagues discovered, to their dismay, that in other continents, the term had acquired quite different meanings. It was difficult for them to accept that, for instance, in Cameroon and elsewhere in Africa, the term "autochthonous" did not primarily refer to groups like the "Pygmies" or endangered pastoralists. Rather, the term was commonly claimed by well-established groups who were in control of the state and who tried to use this against immigrants who were still seen as foreigners. Even more surprising seemed to be the fact that, for instance, in Flanders and the Netherlands, the majority of the population was happy to be labeled "autochthons." As one participant from Quebec put it most eloquently, "If the Dutch are so foolish as to label themselves 'autochthons,' it is their affair. But the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations has already

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63. Particularly galling is the memory of the French institution of the Indigénat – the lower juridical status of the *indigènes* (in sharp contrast to the *citoyens*), which until 1944, gave the harsher forms of French colonial rule (including policies of coercive labor and corporal punishment) a formal basis. Compare the challenge implied by the quite brutal name–at least in French–of a recent film, INDIGÈNES (Tessalit Productions 2006), on the generally neglected role of African soldiers in the French army in the Second World War.

decided that autochtone is the French translation of 'indigenous.' And I think we should stick to this."[64]

It was of little use to question the United Nations' mandate regarding a term that clearly had very different histories in different parts of the globe. In addition, the suggestion that the Québécois might be tempted to use the term for themselves in their relation to Anglophone "latecomers" seemed to be even more hilarious to a large part of the audience. Apparently in Canada, the autochthone has to be the "Other," with his own, endangered culture.

III. A NEO-LIBERAL MOMENT? BETTING ON THE MARKET AND "TRADITIONAL" FORMS OF BELONGING

It is tempting to see the recent upsurge of autochthony in different places of the globe as an unexpected outcome of the neoliberal tide that forcefully swept our globalizing world at the end of the Cold War. Indeed, democratization and decentralization, the dominant trends in the African continent since 1990, fit very well with the so-called "Washington Consensus," tersely summarized by Jim Ferguson as a society that believes in "less state interference and inefficiency" and, one could add, more leeway for the market.[65] Yet, the explanatory value of invoking neoliberalism as a final cause may be overstretched.[66] In recent seminars and conferences, many colleagues have warned that this notion, just like globalization, is rapidly becoming a panacea that seems to apply to a discouragingly wide range of phenomena. Therefore, it is necessary to be more specific.

A leitmotiv in the examples above is the surprising penchant of many advocates of neoliberal reform for "tradition" and belonging. There is of course an interesting paradox presented here: how can one combine a fixed belief in the market as the solution to all problems with far-reaching trust in the community or customary chiefs as stable

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64. See the French title of the United Nation's Working Group on Indigenous Populations, *Groupe de travail sur les populations autochtones*, OFF. U.N. HIGH COMMISSIONER HUM. RTS., http://www2.ohchr.org/french/issues/indigenous/groups/groups-01.htm (last visited Oct. 10, 2010).

65. JAMES FERGUSEN, GLOBAL SHADOWS: AFRICA IN THE NEOLIBERAL WORLD ORDER 39 (2006). The term "Washington Consensus" was coined by economist John Williamson in 1989, in order to summarize basic—and supposedly novel—principles behind IMF and World Bank policies at the time. Apparently he bitterly deplored having launched this term subsequently. John Williamson, *A Short History of the Washington Consensus, in* THE WASHINGTON CONSENSUS RECONSIDERED 14 (2008).

66. I thank Daniel J. Smith for his critical comments on this point.

footholds?[67] For Africa, this focus on community, tradition, and chieftaincy seems to be a logical consequence of the belief in decentralization as a panacea. If one wants to bypass the state and reach out to civil society, then local forms of organization and traditional authorities seem to be obvious points of orientation. Unfortunately, this new approach to development tends to ignore that most traditional communities are the product of incisive colonial and post-colonial interventions. Even more serious is the extreme indifference to the fact that focusing on such local partners inevitably raises ardent issues of belonging; that is, chiefs relate only to their own subjects and tend to discriminate against immigrants, who were in fact often previously encouraged to migrate by colonial development projects. Local communities now have a tendency to close themselves off and apply severe exclusion policies to people who were once considered fellows.

For different reasons, the same paradox emerges with the protagonists of the New Right in Europe (and elsewhere). For instance, it is striking that, while liberalism on this continent used to be equated with various forms of anticlericalism (or an insistence on a strict separation of religion and state), neoliberal spokesmen now often plea for a resurrection of "Judeo-Christian values" as an anchor for society. More importantly, they manage to combine the liberal principle of reducing interference of the state with a vocal appeal to the same state to exercise almost total control over society (mostly against suspect immigrants),[68] thus strengthening the presence of the state in everyday life instead of promoting a withdrawal. Neoliberalism may be a fuzzy phenomenon, but this surprising combination of market and tradition has concrete effects.

The above may help to relativize the apparent naturalness of autochthony. In the different contexts discussed above—in classical

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67. Striking illustrations of this penchant are described in the recent thesis by Juan Obarrio, The Spirit of the Law in Mozambique (2007) (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University), on Mozambique which in many respects offers a fascinating view of what the author terms the "Structural Adjustment State." Obarrio describes, for instance, that a senior American UNDP official assured him that "communities know how they are and know also their boundaries perfectly well"–this, in order to counter warnings by some observers that "the" community on which his organization wants to base its new projects might in practice be highly elusive and volatile. Similarly a British USAID consultant insisted that "communities 'will be like corporations, unified single legal subjects under the new land law.'" *Id. See generally* Helene Maria Kyed & Lars Burr, *Introduction: Traditional Authority and Democratization in Africa, in* STATE RECOGNITION AND DEMOCRATIZATION IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA 1, 16 (Lars Burr & Helene Maria Kyed eds., 2007) (noting the unexpected comeback of traditional chiefs in a neo-liberal context).

68. *See, e.g.,* GESCHIERE, *supra* note 1, at 144-45.

Athens, as much as in the different manifestations of the neoliberal moment of our days—autochthony may present itself as self-evident, but in practice, it turns out to be always contested and full of uncertainty. One sad example from a recent article on the Ivory Coast illustrates the dangerous ambiguities hidden in this now so current notion.[69] The article is based on courageous fieldwork on a violent topic: the roadblocks that were erected in the southern Ivory Coast countryside by Gbagbo's Jeunes Patriotes after 2000.[70] Soon these barrages and their revenues—mostly "fines" extorted by violent threats from "strangers"—became a way of life for these youngsters, mostly rurbains (disappointed urbanites, forced by the ongoing crisis to return to "their" village). Quite surprisingly, these Jeunes Patriotes tended to posit themselves as the guardians of autochthony and tradition, often in direct confrontation with their elders, whom they reproached to have squandered their ancestral lands to strangers, leaving nothing for them.[71] Some elders still preferred to lease the land to strangers who at least paid some rent. Yet, while many youngsters succeeded in reclaiming "their" lands, often through violent means, they quickly became disappointed with the rural way of life. A number of them have already tried to sell their new farms in order to get money for a ticket to Europe or beyond.[72]

In this one example, all the tragic contradictions of the notion of autochthony seem to be condensed—most importantly, its basic insecurity, hidden under an appearance of self-evidence, which can so easily lead to violence. More generally, autochthony's volatile relation to citizenship shows that appeals to history and culture, central in such claims to belonging, offer quite slippery footholds for defining who can qualify as a full citizen and who can be excluded as a "stranger." The culturalization of citizenship, which seems to be a recurrent aspect of the "global conjuncture of belonging," has great emotional appeal in many settings. Juridical or economic aspects are thus relegated to the background. Yet, precisely because such cultural and historical claims to belonging are, despite apparent self-evidence, beset by deep uncertainties, they confound issues of citizenship rather than clarify them.

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69. Jean-Pierre Chauveau & Koffi Samuel Bobo, *La situation de guerre dans l'arène villageoise. Un exemple dans le Centre-Ouest ivoirien*, POLITIQUE AFRICAINE, Mar. 2003, at 12.

70. *Id.* at 20.

71. *Id.* at 27-28. See also Cyprian Fisiy, Discourses of Autochthony: Regimes of Citizenship and the Control of Assets in Côte d'Ivoire (Nov. 1999) (paper presented at the African Studies Association Annual Meeting, in Phila.) (unpublished manuscript), for an early analysis of the tensions over land in Ivory Coast between elders and youngsters.

72. *Id.* at 29.